Chapter 7
A Social Democratic Response to Market-Led Education Policies: Concession or Rejection?

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7.1 Introduction

Is the comprehensive school system – a School for All – consolidated by Social Democrats in the 1960s and 1970s being undermined by the Social Democrats themselves? Why have Social Democrats in Scandinavia endorsed and even initiated market-led reforms on education? For instance, why did the Swedish Social Democrats introduce school choice in 1991, which promoted a substantial private school sector? Why did they endorse the right-wing policy of allowing private companies to establish Free Schools for profit at the expense of the Swedish taxpayer? Why did the Norwegian Social Democrats relax state control on education and increase the autonomy of schools? When the Danish Social Democrats were in opposition, why did they agree to an Act proposed by a right-wing government on school choice in 2006 and risk generating greater social segregation?

The almost uniform view among educationalists is that market-led reforms of education are a result of the increasing power of the Right, which has gained sufficient power to push through reforms aiming at creating a quasi-market for education (Telhaug and Tønnesen 1992; Telhaug 2005; Telhaug et al. 2006; Lundahl 2005; Arnesen and Lundahl 2006; Korsgaard 1999). It is true that Social Democracy, in comparison to its almost unchallenged power in the 1960s and 1970s, has ceased to be salient. From 1982 to 1989 and again from 2001 to 2011, a total of 17 years, right-wing governments ruled in Denmark. In Sweden by mid-1980s, two centrist parties, the People's party and the Centre party, had joined the Conservatives in

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creating, for the first time in Swedish post-war history, a concerted bulwark against social democratic egalitarian school policy. In Norway, after many years of social democratic dominance, governments started from 1981 to alternate between minority Social Democratic governments and Conservative-led Centre-Right governments. When in power, right-wing governments have indeed brought about changes to their education systems along market lines, such as introducing a decentralisation process within the school system, increasing diversity of school provision, encouraging competition and promoting parental choice between public and private schools. Moreover, they have initiated a standardisation of the national curriculum in conjunction with national and publically available tests results. However, this does not explain why social democratic parties endorsed some of these right-wing policies that invariably stand in contradiction to their own policy agenda, and, more fundamentally, that they would initiate privatising reforms themselves, which has been particularly evident in Sweden.

Scholars of comparative education, who are concerned with how education policies 'travel' across borders, would argue that the introduction of market-led reforms is a result of policy borrowing. Proponents of this approach (Phillips and Ochs 2004; Morris 2012) suggest that the propagation of educational policies, ideas and practices across countries can be understood as a way governments seek 'solutions' in foreign countries to 'problems' at home. Aspects of perceived successful policy observed elsewhere, such as high PISA scores, types of independent schools or voucher schemes, might then be 'borrowed' to improve practices in the national context. Phillips and Ochs (2004) argue that such transfer of policies can be encapsulated analytically through four stages: (1) cross national attraction, (2) decision, (3) implementation and (4) internalisation. Although many examples of policy borrowing certainly can be identified in modern politics, this approach would fail in developing explanations as to *why* governments choose particular policies in the first place, and, more fundamentally, it cannot explain variations of outcomes across countries. For example, we would be able to shed light onto how the Swedish policymakers looked to Thatcher's United Kingdom for ideas of creating a quasi-market of education but unsuccessful in explaining why Sweden, the most 'social democratic' country in Scandinavia, implemented marked-led reforms on education that far exceeded similar attempts in Denmark and, particularly, Norway. It is ironic, however, that comparative education scholars employing a policy borrowing approach cannot produce credible comparative explanations, if this is understood as the process of the elimination of rival explanations of particular events, actors, structures etc., in order to help build more general theories (Landman 2007, p. 4).

The question therefore still remains why the Social Democrats are 'attracted' to a market-led approach to educational reform, and why the implementation of these reforms have varied significantly across Scandanavian countries. The aim of this chapter is to provide an alternative approach in explaining market-led policy diversity in Scandinavia. We will employ a political economy model, rooted in the *power resource theory,* for explaining education policy choices from the 1980s to the present. Political scientists, wrestling with this issue in regard to social service provision (Esping-Andersen 1985, 1990; Korpi 1989; Green-Pedersen 2002;

Klitgaard 2007a), argue that answers can be found in connection with the retrenchment of the Scandinavian welfare states, and the role social democracy has played in this. We will argue that this viewpoint is applicable to education policy and provides a powerful theory against which to analyse this comparatively. A comparative method – the case-oriented method (Ragin 1987; Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2004; Landman 2007) – will be employed, which aims at maintaining historical context whilst explaining variance of a given outcome by proposing causal relationships, understood in Ragin's (1987) terminology as 'complex conjunctural causation', drawn from insights accumulated in welfare state, coalition policy research and education policy literature. We will analyse education policy choices by shifting governments, which seek to create market-like conditions for educational provision. Hence, we will go beyond a narrow definition of privatisation, which entails a process by which educational provision, anything from schools to services such as school meals and cleaning, is outsourced straight forwardly to the private sector. By also including political attempts at creating a market-like education sector, for example, through parental choice, voucher systems and competition between schools, we seek to embrace the entirety of this 'new' reform agenda. This is a process we describe as 'market-led reforms of education'. Provided that we were only to look at privatisation strictly as outsourcing, it would be difficult to argue that education has been privatised on any significant scale in Scandinavia. For example, private schools in Scandinavia, in contrast to England, are not private as the word indicates as they receive substantial state subsidies.

This chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part, we briefly outline the power resource theory and in the second part employ this theory in the analysis of education reforms in Sweden, Denmark and Norway, respectively. The last part discusses the extent to which the Scandinavian school system, based on the idea of a 'School for All', is eroding, and whether social democracy can be held responsible for this.

7.2 Power Resource Theory and Market-Led Reforms of Education

The power resource theory was borne out of research on welfare state regimes (by, e.g. Korpi 1980, 1983, 1989; Esping-Andersen 1985, 1990) and is based on a theory of distribution in capitalist democracies. This theory holds that early welfare state consolidation and major differences between them, in terms of public spending and citizen entitlements, are explained by the relative political success of the Left, particularly Social Democratic parties aligned with strong trade unions and the middle classes, in the shaping of the democratic class struggle. As the Social Democratic parties have been particularly powerful in Scandinavia, their role in welfare state politics becomes even more important in scrutinising, especially their response to 'threats' from the outside to the welfare state that they once consolidated and, more fundamentally, their need to maintain in order to keep voters support.

Gösta Esping-Andersen (1985, 1990) argues that the Social Democrats not only aspired to create the universal welfare state, it was also a political instrument, which paved their way to power. The result of their many years in government was the development of welfare states in which the public sector was envisaged as a tool that pursues social equality through producing services itself and thereby disengaging citizens from market dependence. Today the public sector is still organised as a virtual state monopoly of a comprehensive social security system of flat-rate and income-related benefits and a wide range of tax-funded, publicly provided social services including health care, care services for children and the elderly as well as compulsory schooling and tuition-free higher education (Esping-Andersen 1985, 1990; Huber and Stephens 2001; Korpi 1983, 1989). Since almost all citizens benefit as social welfare recipients, a large proportion of the electorate has been provided with incentives to support the welfare state. As a result, a political link has been established between Social Democrats and a large proportion of the electorate from mainly the middle class employed in the public sector. This link is crucial for the party to exploit in order to muster political support.

In Sweden this 'symbiosis' of universal welfare state and social democracy appears stronger than in Norway and Denmark. Since the 1980s, the Social Democratic parties have been increasingly exposed to 'outside' threats usually in form of attacks from right-wing parties of 'their' welfare states and therefore have been 'forced' to respond to this. The social democratic response to these attacks, according to power resource theorists, is key to understanding why they have chosen, in some instances, to support right-wing government in their market-led policies, and why they have initiated these types of reforms themselves. It may be unexpected that the Social Democrats would engage in such acts as their support for market-led reforms entails a risk of undermining the very foundation upon which they historically have achieved their unprecedented level of political power. According to Klitgaard (2007a) '[s]ocial democratic governments effectuate market-oriented reforms to protect the universal welfare state as their most valuable institutional weapon' and 'in order to function as a power resource, the welfare state depends on popular trust and the democratic constituency to perceive welfare institutions as legitimate grounds for collective action' (p. 173). In case social democratic politicians have a reason to perceive particular issues as a threat to welfare state legitimacy, they may be prepared to endorse market-type reforms if these are believed to prevent loss of legitimacy and declining welfare state support. In the following, we will analyse this theory empirically on policy choices on education.

7.3 Sweden

At first sight, it appears a contradiction in terms that Sweden with a powerful social democracy and a universal welfare state would pursue market-led reforms on education in the first place. Even by comparison to Norway and Denmark, Sweden often stood out in the discouragement of, and even hostility to, private providers especially

within the health sector and the education system. By the 1960s, most of the pre-existing private providers had been phased out largely through lack of funding. For instance, less than 1 % of school children attended a private school. However, this was to change radically from the mid-1980s and early 1990s when a Social Democratic government initiated decentralisation reforms of the public sector (Blomqvist 2004).

The question is how this unexpected social democratic behaviour can be understood. From a power resource point of view, this is primarily due to the extent to which the Social Democrats were put under pressure by the Right-wing opposition and how they reacted to this. By mid-1980s, the Conservatives were joined by two centrist parties, the People's party and the Centre party in their quest for privatisation and consumer choice, creating for the first time in the post-war period an obstacle for social democratic welfare policies. When the Social Democrats assumed power in 1985, the Right-wing's condemnation of the welfare state had become so insistent that the government was goaded into action. In 1982, the Social Democrats accommodated the Right by enacting a new Public Administration Policy, which entailed decentralisation reforms and the development of a more service-oriented welfare state. The Social Democrats anticipated that this concession would pre-empt the Right-wing from making further demands for market-led reforms. However, not only pressure from the Right made them agree to this policy, there was also a growing dissatisfaction within the party itself that the government actions had not been sufficient enough to reform the public sector. The consequence was that the Social Democrats started to move away from their previous rejection of market-type reforms after the election in 1988. By the time the Budget Bill was passed in 1990, the party had relinquished most of its reservations. The Social Democratic party was not united in this stance, but views of the factious pro-market wing in the party, which revolved around the powerful Minister of Finance, Kjell-Oluf Feldt, came to represent the official party line (Premors 1998; Klitgaard 2007a).

The Social Democrats, during their period in government from 1986 to 1991, decentralised the education system by transferring the administration of Swedish schools to the municipalities, whilst the central state involvement was restricted to deciding general aims for education and providing general funding and inspection (The previous Conservative government, 1976–1982, had open the way for this by transferring state subsidies to the municipalities). In 1990–1991, a new funding scheme, an unspecified block grant, was introduced with the aim of giving municipalities more latitude in disposing resources and organizing schools they saw fit for purpose. The municipalities undertook responsibility for teachers and school personnel, and each school was requested to develop an educational profile. Most surprisingly, perhaps, is that this government introduced parental choice which was supported by a universal voucher system (Richardson 1999).

However, the Social Democrats anticipated that school choice would only be restricted to the public sector, but since the new funding scheme allowed private schools to receive public funding on equal terms with state schools, school choice was inevitably extended to the private sector, too. The Social Democrats, who had strongly opposed public funding of private schools during the 1980s as they feared that it would undermine the principle of creating a 'School for All', collided with the

Conservatives and Liberals over the issue. In a parliamentary committee, in which the government bill proposing the new funding scheme was debated, the Centre party, which was the main political ally of the government, suggested that municipalities should allocate resources to all schools irrespective of whether these were public or private. However, the Social Democratic government had in actual fact already endorsed this viewpoint by allowing parents to choose between state schools and public funded private schools (Richardson 1999; Klitgaard 2007b).

A conservative coalition government under Carl Bildt's leadership from 1991 to 1994 heralded a further shift towards market-led policy on education. A new national curriculum and new forms of state control were enacted, such as national tests and a revised grade system. Moreover, the government replaced the funding scheme, means-tested grants to schools, with a new scheme, which gave private schools the right to receive a sum per pupil of 85 % of the average cost of a pupil in state schools. This change in funding policy resulted in a sharp growth in private schools, the so-called Free Schools, from 60 in 1991 to 709 in 2009/2010, as private schools were enabled to compete with state schools on an almost equal financial basis. The paucity of interested parental and community groups in setting up schools resulted in private business expanding their interests as they were allowed to make profit (Wiborg 2010a).

From 1994 until 1998, the Social Democrats had returned to power, but during their time in office, they did little to alter the previous development of education. Since they had already embraced market-led education policy, it no longer appeared possible to revert to a position similar to that of pre-1980s. Regardless of disagreements within the Social Democratic party, it nevertheless accepted the legitimacy of private providers of social and educational services. However, the political conflicts over user's fees in relation to school choice can according to Klitgaard (2007a) be seen as an attempt by the Social Democratic party to reinvigorate the universal welfare state without betraying its basic principles. The right-wing government, in power between 1991 and 1994, decided that approximately 15 % of private schools' operational costs should be covered by user fees. The Social Democratic party, returning to power in 1994, abolished this legislation arguing that parents' financial situations should not determine the educational opportunities of their children. They decided that private schools should be fully state funded and not allowed to charge parents an additional fee. Private schools were in effect offered as a universal opportunity independent of private incomes. The cross-party consensus about the private schools remains intact to the present day, despite the fact that the Social Democrats have suffered unprecedented losses in the last three successive elections (Wiborg 2012).

7.4 Denmark

The Danish case is made interesting by the fact that even though the country was ruled by right-wing parties for many years (1982–1993, 2001–2011), market-led policies on education have been pursued only to a relatively small degree. To be

sure, when the conservative-led coalition government took over in 1982, it called for nothing less than a 'bourgeois revolution' to put an end to the social democratic 'nanny state'. The government succeeded in shifting economic policies from demand to supply-side economics, to further integrate the Danish Economy in the economy of the European Union and to weaken the role of central state institutions. However, their attempts to cut public social expenditure and reform the basic structure of the welfare state failed (Green-Pedersen 1999; Greve 1997). In regard to education, the long-serving Education Minister Bertil Haarder did not succeed either in bringing about major reforms of education along market lines. He managed to initiate a decentralisation process by which financial resources from the state were transferred to schools as well as pass an Act on School Boards in 1987, which ensured greater parental influence on school boards.

During the 1980s, the Social Democrats launched a devastating attack on the government's attempts to put forward a privatising programme of the public sector. The programme, which contained plans to increase the use outsourcing and lower benefits and wages, was met with such opposition by the Social Democrats and trade unions that the government was forced to withdraw their reform plans (Torfing 2001). In regard to education, the Social Democrats were joined by the small, but influential party, the Radical Left, spearheaded by Ole Vig Jensen, and the Teacher Union, who together attacked Haarder's liberal education policies and demanded a new Education Act that in effect would consolidate the comprehensive school system. It is this success of Social Democratic agitation, Green-Pedersen (2002) argues, that later prevented the Social Democrats from adopting market-oriented policies when they returned to power in 1993. The leadership of the party, inspired by Tony Blair's Third Way, sought to evoke a more positive stance towards market-oriented reforms of the public sector but to little avail. The issue for the Social Democrats was, according to the power resource theory, that they were 'locked' in their own political rhetoric of the 1980s. 'As they successfully defined market-type reforms as an ideological crusade against the welfare state, it has proved impossible to persuade the rest of the party – and the public – that such reforms are now a tool to achieve cheaper and/or better service' (Green-Pedersen 2002, p. 283). When the Social Democratic-led coalition government held power during 1993–2001, it stated that the provision of welfare services should remain a public responsibility. The government passed an Education Act in 1993 and although it was mainly prepared by the previous government and hence bore its imprint, it provided, nevertheless, that academic streaming in grade 8 and 9 would be abolished in favour of mixed ability classes. This Act did indeed consolidate the comprehensive school system that the Social Democrats had been striving for since the 1960s (Wiborg 2009).

The Social Democratic-led government was defeated in the 2001 election and replaced by a Liberal-Conservative coalition government that lasted until 2011. During this 10-year period, a turn towards a market-oriented policy of education became more evident. The government's policy statement from 2001 stated that 'a high attainment level in schools is paramount for success in the labour market in the future. The school of the future should be academic, flexible and forward-looking. In order to increase standards the government wishes to … tighten and specify academic

requirements, which should be achieved at each grade in all subjects, e.g. through the preparation of a more binding curriculum' (quoted in Holm-Larsen 2010, p. 101). In 2001, a new curriculum 'Clear Goals' (*Klare Mål*) was introduced, but just as the curriculum it was replacing, it only outlined a set of broad (but revised) guidelines. The curriculum still allowed teachers to create their own lesson plans to a great extent and utilise learning methods that they saw fit for their pupils' individual requirements. However, in 2003, this curriculum was replaced with a new one, the 'Common Goals' (*Fælles Mål*), which included a more detailed description of the knowledge, skills and understanding required for each subject. In 2009, the requirements of this curriculum were tightened even further resulting in less latitude to the teachers. The government also attempted to create an 'evaluation culture' in schools by requiring teachers to prepare 'pupil plans' (*Elevplaner*), which implied a continuous assessment of pupil's academic progress in all subjects. These efforts culminated in 2006 when national tests were introduced, although they only came into force in 2010.

Moreover, in 2005, an Act on School Choice was passed that extended parental choice to the public school system. Prior to this, parents in fact already had choice, which was made possible by a relatively large private school sector (Korsgaard and Wiborg 2006). This sector was accepted by the Social Democrats in contrast to their Nordic counterparts who took radical measures to reduce it in the 1960s. Now it also became possible for Danish parents to choose a state school across school districts and municipalities. In order to encourage parental choice, the government, with backing from its support party, the Danish People's party, required the schools to create a school website providing information about their educational strategies and detailed results from the national school-leaving exams (Rangvid 2008). During the political negotiations leading to these Acts on education, the government received support from the Conservatives, the Danish Peoples party and the Social Democrats, whereas the Radical Left, the Socialists and the Christian Democrats voted against. Initially, the Social Democrats and the Teacher Union were strongly against the government's education policy, particularly the issue of national tests, but they agreed with the government in the end. They defended their act of support in a social democratic manner by purporting that increasing academic standards would help avoiding middle-class flight from state schools and thus promote social cohesion in the Danish society. In 2011, a Social Democratic minority government returned to power and it remains to be seen to what extent they will continue the policies of the previous government or divert from them (Juul 2006; Wiborg 2012).

7.5 Norway

In contrast to Denmark and, particularly, Sweden, education in Norway has been subject to market-oriented reforms to a lesser degree at least until 2001. One important reason behind this is due to a greater consensus across the Right and Left in Norwegian politics. To be sure, market-oriented reforms have indeed been introduced and the Social Democrats have followed suit in ways similar to their

neighbouring counterparts. Most public sectors saw reforms in which management by objectives was implemented as a steering principle and state-owned companies were partly privatised (Slagstad 1998).

During the period of 1981–1986, the Conservatives initiated a decentralisation process of education by which economic resources and responsibility were transferred from the state to the municipalities. A revised national curriculum, *Mønsterplan for Grunnskolen*, which took effect in 1987, heralded a slight turn towards a neo-liberal and a neo-conservative stance by emphasising the autonomy of teachers and the development of a 'national knowledge community' (Telhaug 2005, p. 34; Telhaug et al. 2006). When the Conservative government left office, the Social Democrats assumed control from 1986 until 1997 except for a brief interruption by a Conservative coalition government in 1989–1990. The Education Minister, Gudmund Hernes (1990–1995), who made the strongest mark on education policy at the time, was, in the mean, supportive of traditional social democratic values on education by defending the strong state-controlled education system (although he accepted the previous governments' devolution of economic resources) and comprehensive education. Attempts at privatisation that would exceed what was stipulated in the Private School Act of 1985 were simply rejected during his time in office. However, in regard to the reform of the national curriculum, he made concessions to the Conservative's demand of raising academic standards by rejecting the traditional social democratic scepticism towards grades, exams and national tests that was still prevalent in his party. Strongly influenced by the cultural literacy movement, he introduced a more standardised and prescriptive curriculum. It is interesting to note that the centralised curriculum appeared to stand in contradiction to the management by objectives policy in the education sector and the Municipality Act of 1992, both of which were intended to enhance decentralisation and the autonomy of the municipalities (Volckmar 2008).

It is fair to say that market-oriented policies during the 1990s were introduced to a modest degree, but this was to change when a Conservative-led coalition government obtained power in 2001. The Education Minister, Kristin Clement continued the decentralisation process through transfer of regulative power from the central state to the municipalities, including teachers' working conditions and salaries. Wage bargaining was supplemented with local negotiations, and by 2002, the majority of municipalities had introduced merit pay for teachers although this was not linked to student's test results. A new curriculum, coined as the 'Knowledge Promotion', was introduced, which increased teacher autonomy and emphasised the formation of basic skills and result-oriented objectives in each subject. In 2004, national tests were introduced. The results of the national tests were made public in order to promote parental choice and competition between schools to attract the best performing students (although this requirement was withdrawn a year later) (Volckmar 2011). During the political negotiations about national tests, a majority agreement was reached across political parties including the opposition, but the Socialists and Centre party voted against. The Social Democrats were sceptical at first, but since they had already accepted the policy of raising academic standards, they were compelled to agree to the Act in the end. This concession to the Conservatives, however, did not

include the Swedish inspired Free Schools. The government passed an Act on Free Schools, which allowed private providers to establish Free Schools with state subsidies covering 85 % of the operational costs. However, in contrast to the Swedish Free School Act, it was not possible for private providers to make profit. This Act was in sharp contrast to the previous Private School Act from 1985, which stipulated that private schools were required to offer a pedagogical or religious/denominational alternative to public schools. Subsequently, a few Free Schools were established, but this development was stopped in its tracks when the coalition government made up by the Social Democratic party, Centre party and the Socialist Left party obtained power in 2005. The government immediately abolished the Free School Act and in its place introduced a new Act on Private Schools in 2007, which was largely based on the Act from 1985 (Volckmar 2010).

The coalition government proclaimed that Free Schools were undesirable, but, in fact, they accepted all other policies on education introduced by the previous government. Even the Socialist Left party who had traditionally distanced itself strongly from right-wing education policies endorsed these. The Knowledge Promotion reform shaped by neo-liberal ideology thus gradually became a unified political project, but one which allowed individual parties to have a say in the details of its implementation. An absence of a political alternative to this education reform is largely due to the emergence of a new consensus across the Right and Left. The Socialist Left Minister of Education, Kristin Halvorsen, stated that achieving high academic standards by itself justifies a state comprehensive school is indicative of this 'new' consensus (Volckmar 2011, p. 275). The coalition government supports the policy of a 'School for All' and regards the Private Education Act of 2007 as a bulwark against further expansion of private schools. However, the number of private schools has increased under this government anyway. In rural areas, where municipalities close down small schools in favour of bigger ones, which are financially viable and offer higher qualified teaching staff, parents tend to make use of the Private Education Act to reopen a local school usually a private Montessori School.

In 2013, a national election will take place. Should right-wing parties win the election further attempts at developing market-like conditions for education will undoubtedly result. Judging from the social democratic response to right-wing policies particularly during the last decade, they will more than likely continue to embrace this, thus allowing a 'creeping' privatisation within the public education sector. However, in comparison to Sweden, social democratic concessions to the Right have generally been more limited, which explains why Norway appears to have maintained its comprehensive school system more or less unaltered since it was consolidated in 1969 (Volckmar 2010).

7.6 Scandinavia Compared

In this chapter, we have demonstrated that market-led reforms have made their way into Scandinavian education albeit in different ways. In Sweden and Norway, decentralisation has featured much stronger in the reform plans than in Denmark as

a long-standing tradition of local involvement in education has prevailed here anyway. For historical reasons, private schools have played a stronger role in Danish education and have been maintained even under social democratic rule. This situation allowed a greater diversity of education provision and parental choice. By contrast, Social Democratic governments in Norway and Sweden almost abolished the private education sector by the 1980s, but Conservative governments have since then sparked new life to private education at least in Sweden thanks to private business involvement. In regard to the curriculum reforms and the introduction of national tests, the Scandinavian countries have followed remarkably similar routes. The publications of PISA results were exploited by politicians to legitimise the raising of academic standards and the testing of same. We have argued that right-wing governments since the 1980s have initiated most of the market-led reforms of education, but the extent to which they have been carried out across the Scandinavian states depends largely on social democratic consent. As this comparison has shown, the Swedish Social Democrats have given greater credence to market forces for improving education, whereas the Social Democrats in Denmark and Norway have been more reluctant towards this. The social democratic response can be seen as one contingent factor, but unlikely the only one, that helps explaining comparatively the variance of market-led reforms on education in Scandinavia.

7.7 Are the Social Democrats Undermining Their 'School for All'?

Finally, we will offer a brief discussion as to whether one of the tenets of Social Democratic education policy, a 'School for All', is being undermined. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Social Democrats consolidated the comprehensive school system in Scandinavia, which implied an all-through system of education from grade 1 to 9/10 with mixed ability classes (Wiborg 2009). It appears that education scholars are correct to claim that the comprehensive school system has persisted almost unchanged until today, but there is mounting evidence which suggests that the 'School for All' ideal underpinning this system has lost some of its impetus. The move away from using the traditional term to describe the comprehensive school (*Enhetsskolen*) in Norway to a new term (*Fellesskolen*), which the Right will accept, is indicative of this change (Volckmar 2010). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to address this evidence in any detail, but we will highlight a few issues, such as the effects of private education, decentralisation and school choice.

The private school sector in Scandinavia is still relatively small, although it has experienced growth over the last two decades, especially in Sweden. Given the increased state support to private schools and their popularity among the urban, professional middle class, this sector is likely to continue to expand. This will largely depend on business involvement, however, rather than private providers, such as parents, religious groups and charities. The latter has contributed insignificantly to the recent expansion of private schools in contrast to the profit-making education companies. Only in Sweden such companies are allowed to operate, and

they will probably continue to expand their business interests as long as profit can be made, although this is somewhat curbed by increasing state regulation and control as well as the smaller birth cohorts of the early 1990s, who are beginning to reach upper secondary education. The comprehensive school system has indeed been challenged by the expanding private school sector, but, Sweden aside, this has neither led to a public mistrust of state schools and its teachers nor to a common belief that state education is of less value than private education. At present, there are no plans by Norwegian and Danish governments to allow education companies to run schools for profit.

Scandinavian governments have been keener to structure public education according to market ideology than boosting the private education sector. Both Sweden and Norway abolished their long-lived tradition of centralised state control over education and devolved increasing levels of responsibility to municipalities and schools. This brought them in many ways *un par* with the Danish situation as local control has prevailed here throughout most of the post-war period. Not only did this process involve administrative decentralisation but also of regulatory and financial powers to municipalities and schools in order to meet the demand for increased participatory democracy at local level. The consequences of this major policy intervention in Norway and Sweden are still widely discussed, particularly the risk of producing greater inequality between municipalities and schools. For instance, the Municipality Act from 1992 provided municipalities in Norway the opportunity to test children in addition to the already existing national tests. Some municipalities have pursued testing more than others, which have resulted in greater differences in testing practices across schools (Marsdal 2011). There are still outspoken left-leaning politicians and educationalists who argue that reverting to the old centralised system would ensure greater equality through control over resource allocation and protection against privatisation.

The most consequential development for state education, perhaps, is the introduction of school choice. Typically, middle-class parents living in urban areas are increasingly exercising their right to choose the school their child will attend. The motives behind parents' choice of a school different from the one allocated by the municipality are complex. According to a recent study by Rangvid (2008) on Danish parents' school choice, parents tend to take their children out of a municipality school if the enrolment of immigrant children has exceeded 30 %. The study also found that parents will opt for a private school rather than a different municipality school. They tend not to be motivated by the test results of the school (in general, private schools have lower test results than municipality schools), but by the small size of the school and if it offers a particular pedagogical approach, such as child-centred education. In Copenhagen school choice is exercised more widely around 24 % are enrolled in private schools (The national average is about 12 %). The tendency is similar in Oslo albeit on a much smaller scale, but Stockholm, and other major urban areas in Sweden, is a very different matter.

After the rapid growth of Free Schools since the early 1990s, middle-class parents, enjoying choice for the first time since the establishment of the universal welfare state, started to enroll their children in these schools. In 1991 there were a

little over 60 non-public schools in the country and by 2009/2010 their numbers had reached 709. Private providers tend to be overrepresented in high-income areas. Free schools are represented in 64 % of the municipalities and 14 % of them are located in Stockholm (Wiborg 2010a, b). The Free Schools take various forms: from small parental cooperatives whose establishment may have been caused by the closure of a municipal school to schools with a particular educational approach or subject specialisation and schools, which are run by large for-profit education companies. The Swedish National Agency for Education and a number of researchers have provided evidence that school choice has augmented social and ethnic segregation in particular in relation to schools in deprived areas. The private sector is contributing to social polarisation due to their capacity through strategic marketing to attract students from middle classes. This inequality is likely to be exacerbated by the strong tendency to individualise teaching in the Free Schools. The so-called strategy of equity of learning based on child-driven curriculum, free choice and educational flexibility is likely to increase the differences in pupils' academic achievements between different groups instead of reducing them.

The increased devolution of management responsibilities, private education and school choice seem to have created a competitive ground which is not conducive to comprehensive education to continuing to flourish. The inequalities that these have generated already stand to grow wider and more entrenched as market-led reforms of education consolidate as the only imaginable policy paradigm. Social Democrats have until recently remained a bulwark against market-led reforms, but under increasing pressure from the Right, they have given up some of their reservations and endorsed these although in various degrees. It is essential to scrutinise the decisions the Social Democratic parties will make in assessing the extent to which market-oriented policies on education will continue to be implemented and, ultimately, whether the comprehensive school will survive as a 'School for All' in the future.

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